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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives:

Enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work

Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels

Statement submitted by World Vision International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

World Vision welcomes the 2006 Commission on the Status of Women's focus on the enhanced participation of women in development. We share the goal of creating an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and for the advancement of women by addressing education, health, work, and violence. World Vision works in nearly 100 nations to advance all people, with the conscious intention of empowering women and girls through that process. Concrete actions must be taken in response to women and girls' physical, spiritual, and psychosocial needs, ensuring that all people are fully included and can actively design and participate in development policies and practices, regardless of age, gender, disability, health status, ethnicity, or other characteristics.[1] To achieve these outcomes World Vision recognises men and boys must be an integral part of the solution and that women and girls must participate in decision-making at every level: within the family, community, and society.

Education

The Millennium Development Goal of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education is recognised by the UN and development community as essential to women's participation in development and the eradication of poverty. High illiteracy rates among women, especially at the community level, prevent them from equal participation in development. Girl child education and school attendance trails behind boys' in nearly every developing nation.[2] More must be done to influence parents and encourage girls to continue their education. Early marriage is a harmful practice that affects girls' psychosocial and physical health, their future children's development, and usually causes them to drop out of school. There is a great need to educate men and boys on the harms of early marriage and to involve community and religious leaders, as well as government officials, to ensure women and girls' rights, and the enforcement of marriage and family laws.

World Vision recommends:

1. Remove all restrictions to educating girls and women, including school fees, discriminatory attitudes, and lack of safety and transportation.
2. Increase funding for school buildings, girls' toilets, female teachers, teacher training, transportation, and parental cash incentives, to ensure accessible and quality primary and secondary education.
3. Pursue public education and awareness programmes that promote opportunities available for girls (including disabled girls) in learning and careers and the benefits of education, empowering parents and combating the attitude that girls are not worth educating.
4. Include discussions of child protection, domestic violence, and gender roles and equality in all school curricula, and build the capacity of teachers to counteract gender discrimination.
5. Promote programs that address the negative effects associated with issues of dowry and early marriage, and train teachers in appropriate responses to protect girls from early marriage.
6. Address the educational rights of teenage mothers through providing non-formal education opportunities, including literacy, parenting and vocational training.

Health

Poor health and inadequate health care prevent women and their children from participating in development. The AIDS pandemic continues to destroy the lives of women and girls across the world and undermine the development of their communities and societies. Young women are the fastest growing newly infected group because of their lack of social power. World Vision considers the elimination of harmful gender roles and the empowerment of women and girls

[1] This definition of "inclusive development" is taken from the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC), of which World Vision is a member.

[2] UNICEF, *State of the World's Children*, 2004.

essential elements in the fight to stop the spread of AIDS, and invests considerable resources and expertise in this fight in the most affected countries.

World Vision recommends:

7. Raise public awareness of the special health and nutritional needs of adolescent girls, women of childbearing age, elderly, and disabled women.
8. Governments must increase their budgetary allocation to improve health standards for women, ensuring the adequate and regular supply of medicine, materials and personnel trained in the needs of normally and differently abled women, at all health care centres and hospitals of all levels.
9. Facilitate the social, political, and economic empowerment of women so they are in a stronger position to negotiate with partners and protect themselves from HIV.
10. Work through schools, faith-based organisations, and community institutions to ensure access to sound health information; sensitise men and women to the rights and responsibilities of each; and combat the stigma, denial, and discrimination surrounding women and men, girls and boys affected by HIV/AIDS.
11. Work with community leaders, parents, and men to end harmful practices – both traditional and recent – such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, and wife inheritance, which increase gender-based vulnerability to HIV infection and cause other damage to women.
12. Make additional support available for research and distribution of female-controlled HIV prevention methods.

Work

Full access to the workforce and recognition of women's contribution are essential to women's participation in development and the alleviation of poverty. Governments should ensure the exercise of equal economic rights for women and the removal of discriminatory practices. Such actions will aid women's effective involvement in power structures and decision-making positions.

World Vision recommends:

13. Create programmes and raise awareness among men and women to acknowledge and alleviate the burdens of women's triple role in their home, workplace, and community, and promote women's equal participation in decision-making.
14. Enhance the social support system to enable women to work outside of the home by providing free/subsidised and good quality day-care centres for infants and elders.
15. Governmental and international agencies, NGOs, employers, and trade unions must ensure equal rights and equal pay for all women.
16. Uphold women's property rights and create programs to prevent widespread migration of women and girls from rural areas toward urban centres, where they are exploited as labour providers.
17. Women in leadership must be encouraged to build their capacity, confidence, assertiveness, and leadership skills while increasing the number of female staff who serve as role models. At the same time, men must be made aware of the shared benefits of gender equality, enabling them to relate to and work positively with empowered women.

Violence

World Vision calls special attention to the urgent issue of gender-based violence. Violence against women is a violation of human rights that prevents women from participating in development through the deterioration of all aspects of health, precluding access to education, and restricting women from the ability to work securely. Physical, psychological and sexual violence persist as problems that plague every community. Domestic violence is an especially insidious and often hidden form that is tolerated and ignored by governments and law enforcement because it is assumed to be a private matter. Because of their vulnerability and invisibility, disabled women and girls are most likely to face sexual abuse. Armed conflict exposes all people to violence, maiming and death, yet women and girls are put in particular danger of sexual violence because of their gender. Changing the way people think is central to addressing gender-based

violence and World Vision acknowledges that policies and laws will have little effect unless there is community understanding and support.

World Vision recommends:

18. Provide proper procedures, communication strategies, materials, and expertise to investigate rape and other sexual assault cases, and to detect and report cases of violence against women without undermining the security of those who report such cases.
19. Actively address the issue of gender-based violence, and provide funding and advocacy for creating and maintaining statutory laws that will provide a recourse under the law for women and girls.
20. Political, religious, and community leaders, men's groups, and media should play a vital role in encouraging citizens to speak out, accept their responsibilities and take positive steps to prevent domestic violence in their neighbourhoods and society.
21. Governments in conflict and disaster situations must meet women and girls' right to protection, determine feasible mechanisms and enforcement measures, and implement polices to address violations.
22. The international community must support responsive gender-based disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes, with separate facilities for women and girls.
23. Develop a comprehensive approach to child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation that addresses the core elements of the '3 Ps': prevention, protection, and prosecution.

After many decades of working towards women's empowerment, following through on promises and plans at the local, national, regional, and global levels remains a significant obstacle to the advancement of women. It is a challenge to hold governments accountable and put power behind ambitious documents. Many of the treaties and agreements signed by the states become rather symbolic expressions that, in practice, are translated to neither real improvements of position nor change in the status of women. Therefore, World Vision calls all member states to take seriously their previous commitments to women and girls and foster the conditions that build equal relations and accountability between men and women. To do so, World Vision urges governments to put mechanisms in place to enforce the implementation of their own commitments. Furthermore, World Vision suggests partnership with social institutions such as churches, council of elders, community leaders and other sources of influence to remove barriers that prevent women from full participation.